

MADISON PLACE

A journey for Marrie and Don from July 2007

Try to picture a house surrounded by steep clay embankments strewn with coarse tan bark, misplaced yuccas, paddocks full of cape and flat weed, an oversized car parking area, a deep open side drain that picked up from the roadway and sheeted water onto the grass to ultimately run into a farm dam with steep clay retaining walls and undersized overflow. Oh and I forgot to mention large plantings of spiky *Lomandra longifolia* which was spreading like wildfire. So why purchase such a property? Easy answer - my creative good lady saw potential where all I saw was work! Turns out she was right, but then so was I.

The first task was to decide what we didn't want:

- Animals - as we both liked to travel for extensive periods
- Formal flower beds and straight lines
- High maintenance

The next task was agreeing on what we did want. There was no formal plan but many ideas and wants:

- Privacy was our number one priority. This required fast growing trees to block out neighbours
- Native trees and shrubs to attract birds. Sadly many natives did not survive while others went gang busters. The birds did, however, turn up in droves
- Develop in small stages so we could see the fruits of our labour and not become overwhelmed
- Plenty of curves and nooks to entice people to see what is around the next corner
- Park like outcome to encourage walking under trees and seeing them up close
- Unobstructed views of a lake rather than a boring farm dam
- Plants that survived long, dry summers without supplemental watering. Our view was if they didn't survive, they didn't belong

Many of the key challenges were resolved easily:

- The open drain was piped underground and dry creek beds installed to control run off. This allowed us to get mowers onto the grass all year round without bogging
- The dam was reshaped to give more character and soil removed to eliminate steep embankments
- A roundabout with plantings was installed to eliminate the barren car park
- A pool, deck and water feature were installed at the front of the house to hide the steep embankment
- Costs were kept manageable by purchasing tube stock and smaller plants at markets and nursery throw out sections, propagating our own plants and utilising self seeded plants and trees. This required patience but was quite rewarding with some surprises thrown in.

GARDEN NOTES

There are still ongoing challenges, some due to lack of forethought and experience:

- Remembering the names of plants and trees, as no record or location of plantings was kept. Neither of us are botanists or horticultural experts
- Knowing what to plant and where, as it turns out many trees don't like each other
- Keeping algae out of the water feature and lake
- Discouraging blackbirds that persist in throwing mulch over borders, hares that insist on biting off every new planting if not protected and rabbits that dig holes everywhere
- Not to become slaves to the property

Did we make mistakes along the way? Oh yes! Too many to list but some of the key ones stand out:

- We let our children keep their horses on our property for over two years. They destroyed nearly everything and compacted the soil so badly some evidence is still visible to this day
- We put too many plants too close together. Apparently, a common mistake when starting out
- Not thinking about colour in the garden. Shades of green tend to become a tad boring
- Installing a large unprotected vegetable garden which attracted hordes of blackbirds not previously seen on the property

So, the big question is whether we achieved our goals. Ultimately others will be the judge of that, but from our perspective:

- We get to wake up every morning to a beautiful view and the sound of many birds
- We still travel extensively and catch up with friends
- We have been fortunate to unexpectedly host many gardening groups
- We still look forward to getting out and lost in the garden. Like any project there is always room for improvement
- The garden has kept us fit, certainly no need for a gym.

So yes, we developed a garden we are proud of and we did it ourselves. It was certainly a surprise to us that so many others took so much interest in it as well.

These notes can be downloaded from the Open Gardens Victoria website:

www.opengardensvictoria.org.au

Madison Place is located on the lands of the Gunaikurnai People. Open Gardens Victoria wishes to acknowledge the Traditional custodians of this land and we pay respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

